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Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
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Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Universal periodic review

Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the operations of the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review*

* Late submission.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 16/22 and decision 17/119, in which the Council requested the secretariat to provide an annual written update on the operations of the Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review and on the resources available to it. As indicated in the previous update report (A/HRC/25/36), in an effort to consolidate information related to the universal periodic review, and on the basis of Council decision 17/119, the secretariat is aligning the timing of submission of the reports on the activities supported through the two universal periodic review trust funds, namely, the Voluntary Fund for Participation and the Voluntary Fund for Financial and Technical Assistance in the Implementation of the Universal Periodic Review. As such, as of 2015, both annual reports are expected to be submitted to the June session of the Council. The present report provides an overview of contributions and expenditures as at 31 December 2014, together with a description of activities funded since the previous update.

II. Financial situation of the Fund

2. Table 1 shows the detailed financial situation of the Fund as at 31 December 2014 (statement of income and expenditure).

Table 1
Statement of income and expenditure for the period 1 January–31 December 2014
(United States dollars)

Income	
Voluntary contributions received from Governments in 2014	
Singapore	10 000.00
Miscellaneous and interest income	14 123.33
Total income	24 123.33
Expenditure^a	
Staff costs	—
Fees and travel of experts and consultants	—
Travel of staff	57 004.91
Travel of representatives	217 584.59
Contractual services	—
General operating expenses	—
Supplies and materials	—
Grants, contributions and seminars	23 078.00
Programme support costs	39 906.03
Total expenditure	346 875.53
Net excess (shortfall) of income over expenditures for the period	-322 752.20
Opening balance on 1 January 2014	2 176 173.26
Miscellaneous adjustments/savings/refunds to donors	-1 222.84
Total fund balance as at 31 December 2014	1 857 796.93

^a Includes disbursements and obligations.

3. Since the establishment of the Fund, 15 countries have made financial contributions.
4. Since the Fund has not enjoyed a predictable pattern of income, substantial resources are systematically kept as a reserve for future activities; the secretariat of the Fund has been responsive to all requests, in line with the Fund's terms of reference, to enable participation.

III. Activities

A. Travel to meetings

5. Under the terms of reference of the Fund, financial support for travel to meetings is made available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, to cover travel to Geneva by one official government representative in order to participate:

(a) In sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review during which the representative's country is considered;

(b) In plenary sessions of the Human Rights Council during which the outcome of the review of the representative's country is adopted.

6. The Fund also provides for the travel of official representatives (one per delegation) of developing countries, in particular least developed countries, that are members of the Human Rights Council and do not have a permanent mission in Geneva, to act as rapporteurs (namely, members of the troika).

7. In addition to travel costs, the Fund also provides for the payment of a daily subsistence allowance at the rate applicable to Geneva at the time of travel. Under the standing official provisions for such travel, a Government formally requesting this assistance would be advised of the official entitlements for travel and daily subsistence allowance in connection with the required itinerary, which would be reimbursed upon completion of the travel and provision of the necessary supporting documentation. This arrangement, however, proved onerous for many requesting Governments, and since they were unable to submit the claims documenting their travels they were not reimbursed. In an effort to address this issue, since the seventeenth session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (21 October–1 November 2013), the secretariat has arranged to provide the economy class tickets prior to travel, and payment of the daily subsistence allowance upon arrival in Geneva, thereby alleviating most of the difficulties associated with retroactive reimbursement of expenses.

8. Direct ticketing does, however, require more advance planning since Governments are required to designate their delegate with lead time sufficient to enable the secretariat to make the travel arrangements and issue the ticket in accordance with the United Nations official travel policies. In cases where such direct ticketing is not possible, the previous arrangement for retroactive reimbursement of travel expenses is still provided.

9. A total of 15 States reviewed in 2014 requested financial assistance for travel to the sessions of the Working Group at which they were reviewed. Of those, eight were least developed countries or small island developing States. Five States, of which four were least developed countries or small island developing States, requested financial assistance for travel to attend the session of the Human Rights Council for the adoption of the outcome of their review. Of the 15 States, 14 have already received reimbursement for their expenditures.

10. Table 2 below shows the breakdown of financial assistance and annual expenditures, complete with the amount authorized, status of reimbursement and total commitments to date with regard to the financial assistance provided for the travel of government delegates to Geneva.

Table 2

Expenditures for travel of government representatives to attend sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review and plenary sessions of the Human Rights Council

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number of countries reimbursed</i>	<i>Amount authorized pending claim (United States dollars)</i>	<i>Amount paid (United States dollars)</i>
2008	6	13 280	16 885
2009	17	33 846	23 568
2010	23	46 365	39 942
2011	21	81 778	11 698
2012	3	12 920	11 295
2013	6	35 176	35 176
2014	15	57 564	53 939
Total			192 503

B. Training

11. The terms of reference of the Fund allow the financing of briefings prior to the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review to assist countries in the preparatory process. These briefings usually consist of plenary segments and breakout group discussions during which the policies, procedures and modalities of the universal periodic review are examined, information is exchanged, and good practices and lessons learned are discussed concerning the organization of national consultations, the setting up of interministerial coordination mechanisms, the drafting of national reports and participation in the interactive dialogues held by the Working Group and the Human Rights Council in plenary session.

12. Increased efforts were invested in keeping States engaged in cooperation with the universal periodic review mechanism. This relates in particular to small island developing States and least developed countries with no representation in Geneva. Targeted outreach activities in 2014 involved bilateral meetings with the embassies of those countries in New York (10–14 February) and Brussels (26–28 November) and a training seminar in Casablanca, Morocco (9–11 December).

13. The bilateral briefings in New York and Brussels were part of a broad strategy to engage countries with limited human capacity through different entry points. The New York mission was part of a set of briefings that were initiated in 2009 as outreach activities to inform delegations about the universal periodic review process and mechanism. The initial format of the briefings was revisited in 2012 to focus on bilateral meetings at the Permanent Missions of selected small island developing States and least developed countries, including a general meeting with all interested delegations. In February 2014, meetings were requested with the Permanent Missions of Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Fiji, the Gambia, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Saint Lucia and

Suriname. Meetings were subsequently held with the delegations of those countries, with the exception of Dominica, Fiji, the Gambia and Nauru.

14. The bilateral and tailored nature of each briefing was highly appreciated and positive feedback was received from the delegations concerned. While in most cases the New York representation was in charge of relations with the United Nations, including in Geneva, in some cases Permanent Representatives to the United Nations were based in Brussels. It was found that in the past, owing to proximity and ease of contact, engaging Brussels-based embassies of States increased the chances of securing the consistent engagement of those States and facilitated follow-up to their national obligations. Meetings were held with representatives of Guyana, Malawi, Sao Tome and Principe and Seychelles, and with the representative of the Embassies of the Eastern Caribbean States and Missions to the European Union in respect of Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

15. While in Brussels, OHCHR representatives took the opportunity to hold a series of information meetings with various divisions of the European External Action Service. During the course of those meetings, participants expressed a keen interest in the universal periodic review. They expressed interest in what they referred to as "horizontal issues", namely, coordination between agencies and delegations on human rights issues, and in understanding better the role and involvement of civil society organizations throughout the universal periodic review process.

16. In follow-up to the seminar organized in Mauritius in July 2013 (see A/HRC/25/36, paras. 12 and 19) a seminar was held in Casablanca from 9 to 11 December, focused on methods of work and modalities of engagement of least developed countries and the small island developing States with the Human Rights Council and the universal periodic review. A total of 37 officials, representing 20 countries, travelled from Geneva or their respective capital to participate in the event. Staff from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Vice-President of the Council participated in the briefing as resource persons.

17. The Casablanca seminar provided an opportunity for French-speaking States to deepen their knowledge of the Human Rights Council and the universal periodic review and to increase their skills through a simulation exercise on the analysis of recommendations and determination of position by States under review. It also included an exercise in which delegates were able to take on the role of troika member, which was perceived as an effective learning tool for delegates whose States had not yet served as members of the Council and that had consequently not had opportunities to engage with the mechanism as part of a troika.

18. The fourth seminar organized by the International Organization of la Francophonie in partnership with OHCHR on the universal periodic review was held in Chisinau in April 2014. The main objective was to identify challenges faced by francophone States in the implementation of universal periodic review recommendations and recommendations emanating from other human rights mechanisms. The seminar was also aimed at highlighting positive examples of such implementation and follow-up measures.

19. The seminar was organized around four main themes, which participants debated in working groups: national plans for the implementation of recommendations; assessment of the implementation of recommendations; preparation and drafting of the national report; and technical and financial assistance for the implementation of recommendations.

20. A number of conclusions were drawn at the seminar; they were focused, in particular, on the cyclical nature of the universal periodic review process; the number and formulation of recommendations; the usefulness of mid-term reports to keep track of the status of implementation of recommendations and related challenges; the importance of

identifying indicators to monitor progress; the role of civil society and national human rights institutions throughout the process; and the increasing role and the value added by the involvement of parliamentarians.

21. OHCHR formalized a partnership with the Inter-Parliamentary Union in order to strengthen the participation of parliamentarians in the work of the Human Rights Council, with a specific focus on the universal periodic review and the implementation of recommendations emerging from the review, and in recognition of the importance of such participation. In this context, a series of regional seminars were held in 2014, namely, in Bucharest (February), Montevideo (July) and Rabat (September). Parliamentarians from the respective regions were brought together at the seminars with a view to familiarizing them with the universal periodic review process and identifying areas for their intervention and involvement.

IV. Conclusions

22. The Voluntary Fund for Participation in the Universal Periodic Review continued to facilitate the participation of developing countries, and in particular least developed countries, in the sessions of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review at which they are considered. Assistance has been provided to those States, at their request, to enable them to participate in the adoption of their outcome document by the Human Rights Council at its plenary sessions. In that regard, and in addition to the relevant correspondence, the secretariat is following up with delegations through a more proactive approach to ensure that all States entitled to assistance under the Voluntary Fund avail themselves of the opportunity.

23. Since the inception of the universal periodic review and the inherent related challenge to ensure that participation is indeed universal, the needs and constraints of least developed countries have been considered. Ensuring the informed, regular and full participation of States with little resources and no representation in Geneva, in addition to all other States, requires regular outreach activities. Specific attention and focus have been given to those countries through targeted initiatives either at the bilateral level or through the organization of subregional seminars. Initiatives to follow up on the Mauritius and Casablanca seminars will be pursued in 2015 through targeted seminars for Lusophone countries and Caribbean States.

24. OHCHR is expanding and strengthening its partnership with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, and the series of regional seminars will be continued in 2015. It is expected that once the first round of seminars is concluded a compilation of the good practices that emerged in the meetings will be prepared and widely shared among relevant stakeholders.

